



Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

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"At this point, we don't how many wild hogs are actually out there, but we are taking the threat very seriously. We've launched a full scale assault on these animals, and our goal is to completely eradicate the population."

DNR Wildlife Management Biologist, Carl Priebe.

FREE ROAMING HOGS IMPACTING SOUTHWEST IOWA LANDSCAPE

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

RIVERTON--There's trouble brewing, and the stage is set for ecological disaster. Exotic Russian hogs have invaded southwest Iowa's Riverton Wildlife Unit.

Commonly referred to as wild boars, Russian hogs are large, black bristled, hump-backed animals that, for most of us, are best equated with movies featuring mid-evil hunts and extravagant feasts in royal dining halls. A native of northern European forests, Russian hogs may attain weights reaching several hundred pounds. Some of the animals have been brought to America and released on pay to hunt shooting preserves. Escapees have established wild populations. In 2004, a Russian boar weighing 1,000 pounds and sporting 9-inch tusks was shot in Georgia. Officially named *Hogzilla*, the boar is thought to be a New World record. In Iowa, the Riverton hogs are believed to

have escaped from a nearby shooting preserve located in Fremont County.

Although new to Iowa, free roaming hogs have been an ongoing problem in several southern states. Universally despised, wild hogs are most noted for their incessant rooting and voracious appetites. Often referred to as Nature's bulldozer, wild hogs are nothing short of a natural disaster on hooves. When it come to wreaking havoc on natural ecosystems, nothing does it better. In The South, some wildlife biologists will even go so far as to rank free roaming hogs in the same category as fire ants, floods and hurricanes.

"In Iowa, we have already received a preview of just how destructive these animals can be, and I think it's safe to say that they've gotten our full attention," said DNR Wildlife Management Biologist, Carl Priebe.

A notable example of that destruction occurred last summer when a group of 12 free roaming hogs invaded a 27-acre corn field. Ravaging the plot like a living whirlwind, the pigs knocked down stocks and destroyed ears throughout the field. When the damage was assessed, it was discovered that the 12 pigs had destroyed a full 65 percent of the crop.

"We've also seen some severe damage to timbered areas," said Priebe. "At one location, we discovered a full acre and a half of completely bare ground. In that case, it literally looked as if someone had taken a plow through that section of the woods."

In addition to opening fragile woodland soils to erosion and destroying native plant life, foraging hogs also compete with desirable species such as squirrels, wild turkeys, and deer for natural food sources such as acorns and other mast crops.

"Whatever these animals come across they'll eat," said Priebe. "If they find acorns, they'll eat those. If they come across a turkey nest, they'll eat the eggs. They'll even eat a fawn."

Unfortunately, it appears as if a wild hog's capacity for destruction is only rivaled by its ability to reproduce. Adult sows routinely pump out two litters of 4 to 8 piglets per year. Within six months, those youngsters are sexually mature and ready to begin producing young of their own. A study conducted in the southern U.S. found that, even with natural mortality, a herd of just 10 free roaming hogs could build to a population of 2,500 animals within five years.

In Iowa, as elsewhere, wild hogs enjoy no legal protection. There are no bag limits, no closed season, no restriction on weapons. Unfortunately, there are also no case studies of where hunting has been a viable means of hog control.

"Although I've talked to biologists in other states, I haven't been able to find a single case of where hunting has had an effect on populations," said Priebe. "There is some interest [in hunting] and, so far, hunters have killed 13 pigs here. But it seems that

for every one or two hogs actually shot, another 9 or 10 become educated.

"These hogs are truly wild and are very sensitive to human presence. After just two days of hunting pressure, the pigs at Riverton had already moved a mile and a half and became completely nocturnal. I think it's obvious that hunting alone won't control them."

Catching wild hogs in baited live traps may provide greater potential. Earlier this spring, the DNR attempted to lure pigs into a 15-foot-diameter circular walk-in trap baited with corn. The trap was patterned after those currently being used by the U.S. Department of Agriculture animal damage control agents in Missouri.

"We set the trap in March, and immediately caught 20 hogs -- two mature sows accompanied by 18 young pigs. I thought, No Sweat, we can catch these things," said Priebe. "That initial catch was misleading, and it's all been uphill since then."

"One of our major problems is that wild hogs are completely unpredictable. At Forney Lake, we baited a site with corn. When we came back the next day, the hogs had cleaned up every kernel. We rebaited, and planned for success. Two days went by and the pigs never showed. On the third night they returned, completely rooted up a substantial area next to the bait, and never touched a single kernel of corn. That's when I began to realize how challenging this project was going to be."

"The big difference between Iowa and other states is that we're still dealing with a very limited number of hogs. So far, a total of 21 pigs have been trapped, 13 have been shot, and there are two confirmed road kills. I think there are probably less than 50 animals still at large. There is still a chance that we'll win this thing."

###

HUNTING WILD PIGS MAY DO MORE HARM THAN GOOD

Carl Priebe used to spend his days overseeing the 20 Wildlife Management Areas in southwest Iowa. That meant making sure the waterfowl, upland game and forest animals had the food and shelter they needed on the roughly 10,000 acres those areas spanned. It meant working with private landowners who wanted the same for the animals on their own property. It meant maintaining the numerous public use facilities so frequently used by hunters and anglers alike.

Now the Iowa DNR wildlife management biologist spends his time studying, tracking, monitoring and trying to eradicate an animal few ever thought would pose a problem in Iowa -- wild Russian hogs.

“We spent most of March doing nothing but pigs...,” Priebe said, referring to himself and his staff of three, “building traps, checking traps, baiting sites and looking for new bait sites.”

And answering phone calls. Lots of them. Since wild pigs are not protected in Iowa, many of the calls came from hunters looking for an opportunity to pursue an animal that previously was only an option on pay-to-hunt game farms. And that is causing some consternation to the staff whose goal is to eradicate an animal that is already wreaking havoc on one wildlife area, and is poised to do the same on others if left unchecked.

“In other states, hunting has not proven to be successful in stemming population growth,” Priebe said. “That’s why we’re resorting to trapping.”

In fact, hunting may even be counterproductive.

“If 10 pigs walk out into a field and a hunter shoots one, he’s killed one pig but educated nine,” he said. “And it appears that hunting pressure tends to turn them nocturnal, and they will move readily if pressured.”

Even more disconcerting for Priebe is the safety issue. He’s concerned turkey hunters will see the pigs as an opportunity to add to their game bag and will be woefully under-matched in the field, given the fact turkey hunters can’t have anything larger than No. 2 nontoxic or No. 4 lead shot in their possession when hunting. He’s also concerned that a turkey hunter dressed in full dark camouflage could be mistaken for a Russian hog, which is typically solid black in color.

“I am a little nervous with turkey season, having turkey hunters (and mushroom hunters) out there mixing with someone who has a high-power (rifle) shooting pigs,” Priebe said. “We’d prefer to handle the situation through trapping, but if nothing else, we’d at least like to see the pig hunters hold off until after the turkey and mushroom seasons.”

###

BRUSHY CREEK TO NO LONGER ALLOW OVERFLOW CAMPING

LEHIGH – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources will no longer allow camping in the day use area next to the north equestrian campground at Brushy Creek State Recreation Area once the campground has filled.

“We simply cannot allow the extra campers to use the area once we reach capacity at our campsites because the facilities in the park are not designed to handle the

additional activity,” said Amber O’Neill, park manager for Brushy Creek. O’Neill said problems in the past include overflowing the wastewater collection system and damage to the trails.

“We know campers travel long distances to use Brushy Creek, so we suggest that they call the park before they leave to check on campsite availability,” O’Neill said. The park office number is 515-543-8298. O’Neill said if Brushy Creek is full, there are some options for campers needing a site.

“Our busy times are holiday weekends, including Labor Day weekend, when we usually fill to capacity by noon on Friday,” she said.

Information about alternative parks is available on the Iowa Department of Natural Resources website <http://www.iowadnr.com/parks/index.html>. Questions can be sent by e-mail to Brushy_Creek@dnr.state.ia.us.

For more information, contact O’Neill at 515-543-8298.

###

SPRING RITUAL

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Spring has arrived, and Iowa's hardwood forests have begun to echo with the distinctive, staccato gobble of the eastern wild turkey. Blood stirring and primitive, it compares to no other sound of the wild. For human hunters, the deep resonate rattling is a woodland call to arms: an annual summons that must be obeyed.

As is the case with most world class concerts, obtaining the best seats will mean losing some sleep and may even include a night on the ground. But once the show begins, these small sacrifices seem well worth the effort.

Gobbling is designed to attract hens. The most aggressive toms may begin advertising their presence as the first hint of light begins to color the eastern sky. As dawn approaches, the gobbling intensifies as the symphony is joined by birds from surrounding ridge tops. Gobbling will often peak by sunrise and then cease altogether as hens assemble around vigorously strutting males. Strutting most often occurs in forest openings or along field edges where males feel most visible.

During the first half of the spring breeding season, the woodland concert is heavily punctuated by the cutts, cackles, and raspy yelpings of inquisitive hens. By late April, however, most hens will have become more subdued as they engage in nest site

selection or egg laying.

Once a majority of these hens have begun to incubate eggs, hunters will frequently encounter a distinct and final spike in gobbling activity. By now the forest will have achieved full canopy. For human hunters, the dense foliage provides a catalyst for the most effective stalks [and close encounters] of the season.

If conditions are just right, a gobbling tom can now be approached to within 50 or 60 yards --- sometimes less. Many of these mature, 20-plus pound birds will have recently become card carrying members of the *Gobbler's Lonely Hearts Club*. At these times, a turkey's immediate and explosive reaction to a series of soft yelps on the box call can be downright unnerving.

Although a dense tapestry of ferns, tree bark, and gooseberry leaves may prevent the hunter from obtaining an immediate visual conformation, each new gobble loudly declares that the Woodland Monarch is indeed headed your way.

Suddenly, he appears. And although you've seen it all before your breath is suddenly taken away as, bedecked in all his iridescent splendor, the Timber Ghost boldly struts directly toward your concealed position. Your pulse quickens and you've already begun to tremble. Then, at 25 yards, it happens. The old tom pauses and emits a defiant, in-your-face, triple gobble.

At this range the sound is deafening, and the entire woodland seems to quake under his fury. And although you didn't need this heady reminder, the ancient rattle proclaims to all the world why spring turkey hunting is simply the finest outdoor pastime ever invented.

###

PRAIRIE RESCUE 2005 COMES TO NINE SITES

DES MOINES – Iowa volunteers will return to their roots next week when nine prairie rescue events occur across the state.

The sixth annual Iowa Statewide Prairie Rescue – a series of volunteer efforts to save Iowa's prairie habitat – will hold events on April 14 and April 16. Volunteers will remove invasive woody species, plant native grasses and flowers, and help restore and preserve Iowa's natural heritage in other ways.

The April 14 event will occur at Volga River State Park (10225 Ivy Road, Fayette, IA). Participants should meet at the park office at 10 a.m..

Events on April 16 include:

- Ames High Prairie State Preserve: Volunteers should meet at 9a.m. outside the Ames High School (1921 Ames High Drive, Ames, IA) near the “Richard M. Pohl Memorial Preserve” sign.
- Cedar Bluffs State Preserve: Volunteers should meet near the parking area at Cedar Bluffs (10 miles west of Oskaloosa). Participants can take part in a guided hike through oak savanna, sandstone canyons, and maple-basswood forests from 10a.m. to 11:30a.m.. The prairie rescue will run from noon to 2:30 p.m.
- Hayden Prairie State Preserve: Volunteers should meet at 9 a.m. The workday on this 240-acre tall grass prairie in northwest Howard County will last until 1 p.m.
- Lake Anita State Park: Volunteers should meet at the park office (55111 750th St., Anita) at 9 a.m.. They will plant native grasses and flowers to increase bio-diversity.
- Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge: Volunteers should meet at 8:30 a.m. at the Prairie Learning Center (PO Box 399, Prairie City). The rescue will include a free lunch, participation badges, and presentations on “Careers in Conservation” and the Iowa River Restoration Project.
- Stone State Park: Volunteers should meet at 9 a.m. at the Mt. Talbot preserve area. Directions are available at the park office (5001 Talbot Road, Sioux City).
- Rochester Cemetery: Volunteers should meet at 10 a.m. at this Cedar County cemetery. They will remove invasive garlic mustard.

In addition, the second annual Ringgold County Prairie Chicken Viewing Day will occur on the April 16 at the Kellerton Bird Conservation Area. Participants will view the recently reintroduced Greater Prairie Chickens as they perform their mating dance on the grasslands. Viewing will begin at dawn (6 a.m.). Participants should bring binoculars. Directions to this and all other Prairie Rescue 2005 events are available at www.inhf.org/prairierescue2005.html.

These events are part of a wider effort to preserve the dwindling Iowa prairie. Native grasslands once covered 70-percent of the state but have been reduced to 0.1-percent of their original size. The remnants, scattered in small patches throughout Iowa, now require the assistance of natural resources staff and volunteers to survive.

Prairie Rescue 2005 invites volunteers to reconnect with Iowa’s prairie roots, and help save this beautiful habitat before it is lost forever. Roughly 25 events will occur across the state throughout April and May. Sponsors include the Iowa Department of

Natural Resources, the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, and other natural resources groups.

Individuals, families and organizations are all invited to participate. Volunteers should dress for the weather (pants and long-sleeves are recommended) and consider bringing a hat, sunscreen, and water. Volunteers should also bring gloves, tools, and lunches (unless otherwise noted.)

For more information about each event, contact the following people:

- **Volga River State Park:** TOM HALVERSON at (563) 425-4161 or at Tom.Halverson@dnr.state.ia.us.
- **Ames High:** ERV KLAAS at (515) 233-3327 or at eklaas@iastate.edu or LAURA NORIAN at (515) 244-5044 or at laura.norian@tnc.org.
- **Cedar Bluffs:** MAHASKA COUNTY CONSERVATION CENTER at (641) 673-9327 or at mccb@mahaskacounty.org.
- **Hayden Prairie:** TERRY HAINDFIELD at (563) 382-4895 or at Terry.Haindfield@dnr.state.ia.us.
- **Lake Anita:** JOSHUA PEACH at (712) 762-3564 or at Joshua.Peach@dnr.state.ia.us.
- **Neal Smith:** ALLAN MURRAY at (515) 994-3400.
- **Stone State Park:** MATT VEON at (712) 255-4698 or at Matt.Veon@dnr.state.ia.us.
- **Rochester Cemetery:** CASEY J. KOHRT at (319) 530-0585 or at cjkohrt@hotmail.com or PETE KOLLASCH at (319) 358-9458 or at pkollasch@igsb.uiowa.edu.
- **Ringold County Prairie Chicken Viewing Day:** MICAH LEE at (641) 464-2389 or at Micah.Lee@dnr.state.ia.us or MEL MOE at (641) 464-2220.

For more information about Statewide Prairie Rescue 2005 contact Katie Kemp at (515) 281-3134 or Katie.Kemp@dnr.state.ia.us

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[Hold the Wilkinson column until April 7]

TURKEY SEASON OPENER

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

A cool morning. Not quite dawn. And the tree top gobble electrifies the area. Another, then another follow; kind of an audible ‘domino effect’ as tom turkeys let the woods know they are awake, and in charge.

Each year, on opening morning, I try to be in place before the first tom cuts loose. It never happens. Speed hiking across the picked field, even an hour before dawn, there still will be a couple dueling gobblers before I get my decoys plugged into the Delaware County bluff. Luckily, they stay put until after the sun pokes over the horizon. As Iowa's regular turkey hunting season opens April 11 (state's first ever *youth* season is April 8-10), I'll be leaning back into an oak trunk on the same hillside, trying to lure in an opening day tom.

Spring hunters have set records just about every year as their numbers rise along with increasing turkey populations. Last year, 50,846 hunters took 25,604 gobblers last year. That 53 percent success rate among *active* hunters (another 5,000 licenses went unused) is among the top in the nation. Most other serious turkey states boast of success rates in the 30s to 40 percent. "I expect another record harvest this year," predicts Department of Natural Resources wild turkey biologist Todd Gosselink. "Partly due to the youth season but; overall, because of the slow increase over the last four years."

That's good news to weather watchers, a year after one of the state's wettest springs on record. Many nests or young poults were washed out by heavy rain or high water at the peak of the hatch. That reduces the number of more gullible 2005 jakes *this* year. "You'll see a decline in jakes, especially in sections of northeast Iowa that had five inches of rain last May," cautions Jim Coffey, who works with Gosselink in the DNR's turkey program. "However, last year's production was still in line with our ten year averages. And there should be good numbers of mature birds. The areas with the best habitat will still have good numbers."

And it's those boss toms that hunters want to bring in anyway. While it is great getting a bird, the 'show' is almost always worth more than the shot. I had to go back and look at my 2003 column to remember shooting my last gobbler. But I could easily describe over a dozen different times when I was hidden in a 'strut zone' witnessing the puffed up, love struck tom dragging his wings to show off for the plastic decoy or nearby hen. To me, those minutes when an unseen, fast-closing gobbler jolts the air are more exciting than finally watching the arrogant turkey strut into view around a clump of multiflora or a rock outcrop; his nearly-neon red, white and blue head stretched high. Once the tom is visible, it's back to work; waiting for him to either cross my shotgun sight or turn away so I can adjust my position.

'Back to Work'? No, that sounds too much like a chore. And there's nothing chore-like about sitting on a hillside, listening and watching the spring woods come to life.

Blind Luck

For thousands of Iowa hunters, the portable blind has made life in the turkey woods a little easier.

As modern turkey hunting grows, so does the line of ‘must have’ products. And blinds offer a cloak of invisibility that’s hard to believe. “If you have a good spot to set up in, turkeys are not shy at all around blinds,” emphasizes turkey biologist Todd Gosselink, from the Department of Natural Resources. “You might have a second person along; maybe a younger hunter who wants to move around. It offers you a lot more flexibility even if you are by yourself. And I’ve seen a lot of video that has been shot from turkey blinds, too.”

Many bow hunters take advantage of the freedom of movement they have in a blind; not having to hold a draw for what seems an eternity while a tom and every hen in the clearing shuffle around.

On the downside, a blind limits your mobility. Once set up, it takes a few minutes to repack it or lug it over a couple ridges as a departing tom’s gobbles grow faint. “I set it up; maybe near a known strut zone or by a field where turkeys might be feeding,” offers Gosselink. “And if I go somewhere else, I leave it.”

Always Better Safe Than Sorry

Dressed in full camouflage, safety is always a priority as spring turkey hunters try to get invisible against the spring background. Properly prepared, though, and those prospective perils are minimized.

“Remember to take in some blaze orange,” reminds DNR recreational safety officer Ken Kenyon. As you pack all your calls and camo clothing, Kenyon says hunters often forget the item that can keep them safe. “A cap, a vest; anything to display as you move; after the hunt, or as you are lugging a bird out.”

Otherwise, Kenyon stresses that hunters should be completely sure of their target... and its background. Hunters should *see* the white-red-blue head of a mature tom; and not shoot at movement. “Along that line, too, don’t wear any clothing with red, white or blue colors exposed,” warns Kenyon. As hunters move on a gobbling tom, the danger factor can escalate. “Stalking is not an effective way to hunt spring turkeys,” he emphasizes. Instead, hunters in that situation might move closer, but then set up and call the tom in to them. With a good share of hunting on public land, Kenyon advises against trying to gobble in a bird.

The Spring Calendar

Iowa turkey hunters have four....and some have five...seasons from which to choose this spring. For the first time, youth hunters aged 12 *through* 15 who have completed hunter education classes may take part in the April 8-10 youth season. Each young hunter must be accompanied by a licensed--but non-hunting adult--who will directly supervise.

The traditional seasons follow the weekend youth period; running April 11-14, April 15-19 (residents only), April 20-26 and April 27-May 15. Iowa residents can have two licenses, as long as at least one of them is for that fourth season. Legal shooting time is from one half hour before sunrise to sunset.

The eight-page Spring Turkey Hunting Guide is available at most DNR offices or retail license vendors. It answers other frequently asked questions; ranging from landowner eligibility to quotas, zones and other regulations.

###

DNR TO UNVEIL GARBAGE SCULPTURE BEFORE EARTH DAY

DES MOINES — The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will welcome a heap of garbage into its Des Moines offices on April 18.

“Fair Catch,” a 10-foot-tall canoe paddle made using volunteer-collected trash, will arrive at 12 p.m. in the Wallace Building lobby (502 E. 9th Street). The public is invited to attend this unique, environmentally conscious sculpture unveiling four days before Earth Day.

Artist David Williamson and DNR staff will be available from noon until 4 p.m. to greet sculpture viewers and answer questions. The sculpture will remain in 2nd floor atrium for viewing after April 18.

Fair Catch honors work done by Iowa DNR volunteers in the annual river cleanup event called Project AWARE (A Watershed Awareness River Expedition). This weeklong outdoor adventure invites volunteers to make a public stand for water quality by canoeing, cleaning, and learning about Iowa’s waterways.

During last year’s event, volunteers collected roughly 96-cubic yards of trash from lakes and streams near the Des Moines River watershed. That same year, Project AWARE welcomed artist David Williamson on board and “Riverse,” a companion artistic effort, was created.

In the first Riverse project, Williamson guided volunteers as they constructed Fair Catch during the 2004 Iowa State Fair. AWARE volunteers and other fairgoers helped smelt, hammer and mold pieces of metal dredged from Iowa waterways. Williamson also invited volunteers to write down their thoughts about water and rivers. The Ogden artist then compiled those thoughts into a collaborative poem called “Clear” that will be displayed alongside the sculpture.

“Some artists, over the past several years, have been involved in making art public,” Williamson said of Riverse. “I’ve been involved in making the process of art public.”

Riverse will return for this summer’s Project AWARE, which takes place from June 18 until June 25 on the Little Sioux River. As in the past, this year’s AWARE will include free camping, low cost meals, and evening presentations on natural resources topics. Please visit www.iowaprojectaware.com for registration materials and more information.

For more information, contact BRIAN SOENEN at (515) 281-6640 or at Brian.Soenen@dnr.state.ia.us.

###

GOOD SUPPLIES OF NATIVE TREES AND SHRUBS AVAILABLE

DES MOINES - More than 7 million trees and shrubs were planted in Iowa for conservation efforts on private and public lands last year. The Iowa State Forest Nursery and several private Iowa nurseries have good supplies of Iowa grown conservation tree and shrub seedlings available for spring planting.

“There are good supplies of white, red, bur and swamp white oak, black walnut, silver maple and 39 other species of conifers, hardwood trees and shrubs available from the State Forest Nursery,” said John Walkowiak, chief of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) forestry bureau.

These conservation trees and shrubs are bareroot seedlings from locally collected, Iowa seed, and range in size from 8 to 24 inches tall. State Forest Nursery prices remain unchanged from last year, ranging from \$0.25 for a 8 to 16-inch tall conifer such as Norway spruce, to \$0.45 for a 17 to 24-inch tall hardwood tree or shrub such as the oaks. Plants are sold in lots of 100 and a minimum order of 500 plants is required.

For people who do not have the land to plant 500 trees and shrubs but are interested in planting their small acreage for wildlife habitat, the State Nursery offers four special wildlife packets of 200 trees and shrubs for \$90. A general Wildlife packet contains 50 each of white pine, bur oak, redosier dogwood and highbush cranberry. A Turkey packet designed in cooperation with the Iowa Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation contains 50 each of gray dogwoods, bur, pin, and white oak for mast production. A Pheasant packet contains 50 each of red cedar, wild plum, ninebark and gray dogwood. A Quail packet contains 100 wild plum and 100 gray dogwood. The Songbird packet is perfect for that odd corner in a larger backyard contains 2 bur oak, 2 white pine, 4 each of wild plum, chokecherry, gray dogwood and serviceberry and sells for \$20 which includes shipping.

To order conservation seedlings from the State Forest Nursery call 1-800-865-2477 M-F 8-4:30 PM or go to www.iowadnr.com/forestry/. Credit card orders are accepted.

Those interested in establishing Farmstead Windbreaks should consider contacting a private Iowa grown nursery that offers larger conifers or transplants in smaller quantities and they can go to www.iowatreeplanting.com for a listing and contact numbers.

For more information, contact Walkowiak at 515-242-5966.

###

CELEBRATE EARTH DAY WITH KEEPERS OF THE LAND

DES MOINES — Join Keepers of the Land, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources' volunteer program, to celebrate the 35th anniversary of Earth Day with volunteer efforts across the state.

Iowans are invited to join other volunteers as they return to the citizen-based spirit of the original Earth Day through various locally organized events. Earth Day began in 1970 when 20 million Americans organized grassroots events to honor the environment. Keepers of the Land gives volunteers an opportunity to carry on that tradition.

All month long, volunteers are invited and encouraged to celebrate Iowa's natural heritage through protection and preservation events.

Opportunities include:

- The 6th Annual Statewide Prairie Rescue: Volunteers will help preserve some of the few native grassland remnants left scattered across Iowa. During 26 events held in April and May, participants will remove invasive woody species, plant native grasses and flowers, and help with controlled burns. (Activities vary depending on site.) See www.iowadnr.state.ia.us/volunteer/pr05/ for more information.
- Operation ReLeaf: During this cooperative venture among the Iowa DNR, Alliant Energy, and local conservation groups, volunteers will distribute low-cost landscape trees to homeowners. Help improve the environment in residential areas during one of these 10 events. See <http://www.iowadnr.com/forestry/urban/> for more information.
- State Parks: Help a state park with a cleanup event, a fundraiser, or another project. You can get involved through volunteer friends groups or by contacting park staff.

Find out more about state park friends groups at:
<http://www.iowadnr.com/volunteer/friendspage/>

- Other efforts: Keepers of the Lands has many other opportunities, throughout the year, for volunteers interested in giving back to the environment. Visit www.iowadnr.com/volunteer/ to search for programs.
- Your ideas: Organize a neighborhood cleanup, a recycling drive, or a community education event. Keepers of the Land relies on local organizers to make things happen. All it takes is an idea and a desire to do good work. Please let us know your plans so that we can help you with logistics, supplies, marketing or other needs you may have.

For more information, contact MERRY RANKIN at (515) 281-0878 or at Merry.Rankin@dnr.state.ia.us.

###

SPRING RACCOON-DEER SPOTLIGHT SURVEY BEGINS

CHARITON - The beam from the spotlight sweeps back and forth across the field as the truck slowly drives down the dusty gravel road. The person with their hand out the window on the passenger side spots a pair of eyes and tells the driver to stop. A little more searching and the person with the spotlight finds 2 more pairs of eyes shining back from the edge of the field. The driver reaches down on the seat and grabs... a clipboard.

“Three deer, right? Any raccoons?” he asks as he records the data on the form. “That makes five in this section. Looks like numbers are down a little this year. We had 7 in this mile last year.”

This scene or one like it will be repeated along more than 90 routes over the next three weeks as DNR wildlife and enforcement personnel conduct the annual spotlight survey. The objective of the survey is to provide an index to the number of deer, raccoons and other furbearers in Iowa. The routes are 25 miles long and the same routes are driven each year. The best counts come on calm nights with high humidity. The counts begin one hour after sunset and usually take about two to three hours to complete.

“The surveys have been run every year since 1978,” said Willie Suchy who coordinates the survey process. “Initially they were designed to give us information on raccoons when pelt prices and harvests were high.” Now that raccoon harvest is less than half what it was back then there is less concern about raccoons. Raccoon numbers have stayed about the same over the past 10 years with an average of 20 to 25 raccoons sighted.

“The surveys have proven to be a reliable indicator of deer numbers as well,” said Suchy. “The results from this survey along with winter aerial deer counts are our best means of assessing deer numbers.”

Deer numbers observed on the spotlight surveys have increased by 25 percent over the past three years. “We expect to see a decline this year after the increased number of antlerless licenses available last fall,” said Suchy. “Aerial counts were down about 10 percent and if the spotlight surveys come down that much it would give me more confidence that deer numbers are headed in the right direction. Our goal is to reduce deer numbers by 25 percent.”

Results from this survey, the harvest survey and the winter deer survey will be used to adjust the antlerless quotas in each county. Public comments on these quotas and other changes in next fall’s hunting season can be made at the public hearings conducted on April 19. These meeting will take place on the ICN. Times and locations can be found on the DNR’s website: www.iowadnr.com.

IOWA FISHING REPORT

For the week of April 5, 2005

www.iowadnr.com

For current information on fishing conditions for your lake or area, contact the office in that district. Phone numbers are listed with each district report.

Northeast

Mississippi River Pools 9 to 15: Water levels are high as snowmelt from Minnesota and Wisconsin has reached the Iowa stretch of the Mississippi River. Even with above-normal air temperatures, the water temperature has decreased slightly and is running in the upper 40s near Guttenberg and is 50 degrees at Bellevue. The water is fairly turbid and water levels are expected to continue to rise for the next few days. Walleye and sauger are moving to their spawning habitat in **Pools 9 to 11** and catch rates have decreased. A few fish can be found in off-current areas and most anglers are using twister tails. In **Pools 12 to 14**, a few saugers and walleye are being caught in the tailwaters of the lock and dams. Due to high water levels, most other species are hard to catch. In **Pools 9 to 11**, some rock bass, freshwater drum, crappie, bluegill and yellow perch are being caught. Most anglers are using worms and fishing in eddy areas near the shoreline. Live bait is always the best choice during the early fishing season.

Cedar, Turkey, Upper Iowa, and Wapsipinicon rivers: These streams have been adversely affected by melting snow in Minnesota. Look for fishing to improve when water clarity increases.

Volga River (Fayette): Smallmouth bass fishing is good using artificial baits including imitation minnow lures, tube jigs and twister tails. Dark, natural colors are working the best at this time of year.

Casey Lake (Tama): Bluegills are biting on small jigs fished in and around brush piles.

Alice Wyth, Mitchell and Brinker [East] lakes (Black Hawk): A few crappies are being caught with the best bite on sunny afternoons. In Brinker Lake, anglers are suspending minnows two feet below a bobber to fish the new shoreline structure in the northeast corner of the lake.

The **trout** stocking season is once again underway and trout stream conditions are good to excellent. The first mayflies and caddis fly hatches are occurring now making this an excellent time to try your hand at fly fishing. Remember that trout have excellent vision, so keep your line light (2 to 4 pound test) and your lures and hooks small! For current trout stocking information, contact the Iowa DNR at 563-927-5736 or go on-line at www.iowadnr.com and check the fisheries web pages to view the 2005 stocking calendar.

For information on fishing in northeast Iowa, call the regional office in Manchester at 563-927-3276.

Northwest

Silver Lake (Dickinson): Anglers are catching a few walleyes on the north shore, around the island and the east side of the lake using minnows.

Lost Island Lake (Palo Alto and Clay): Anglers are catching a few walleyes, but the bite has been sporadic.

Trumbull Lake (Clay): A few northern pike are being caught at the north end using live bait with a slow presentation.

West Okoboji Lake (Dickinson): Anglers are catching crappies in the canals using white tube jigs.

Spirit Lake (Dickinson): A few crappies are being caught in Templar Park. Northern pike are being caught from Hales Slough. Look for areas with flowing water to find pike.

West Fork of the Des Moines River (Emmet): Anglers are catching some walleyes north and south of Estherville. The river has come up slightly and fishing has slowed.

Big Sioux River (Lyon): Anglers are catching walleyes and northern pike at the Klondike Dam.

Clear Lake (Cerro Gordo): The water temperature is in the high 40s to low 50s. Walleye fishing is good. Jig and minnow or slip bobber and minnow is producing fish. Fish the east shore, the Island, Billy's Reef, Dodge's Point or the Ventura Grade for the best action. Remember, there is a 14-inch minimum length limit for walleyes. Yellow bass are biting in the west end around the rushes and at the Ventura Grade. White bass are being caught at the Ventura Grade. Bullheads are fair using night crawlers in the west end of the lake.

Black Hawk Lake (Sac): Channel catfish fishing is good to excellent using shad entrails along windblown shorelines in shallow water. A few walleyes and yellow bass are also being caught.

Storm Lake (Buena Vista): White bass fishing is good to excellent using twisters along shore. Walleye fishing is good along the shoreline from the late afternoon to the early evening. Channel catfish fishing is excellent on shad entrails.

For more information on fishing in northwest Iowa, call the regional office in Spirit Lake at 712-336-1840.

Southwest

Viking (Montgomery): Crappie and bluegills are starting to bite in the coves using tube jigs.

Cold Springs (Cass): Fishing is fair for 6 to 8-inch crappies using jigs/minnows near shore around structure.

Manawa (Pottawattamie): Recent fish surveys showed a good number of walleye found along beach area and north part of the lake near both boat amps. Walleyes can be caught wading in the shallow, sandy areas and casting smaller jigs with twister tails tipped with minnows.

Orient (Adair): Fishing is fair for 9-inch crappies along the rocks in the evening.

Mormon Trail (Adair): A few crappies and catfish are being caught.

Prairie Rose (Shelby): Crappies are moving in to inlets where water is warmer. Catfish are being caught on dead minnows and cut bait.

Farm Ponds: Crappies, bass and bluegills are being caught in shallow bays that warm quickly.

Below Saylorville Dam (Polk): Anglers are picking up some walleyes using various lures.

Easter Lake (Polk): Crappie fishing has been good with jigs, and anglers are catching some walleyes.

Rock Creek (Jasper): Bluegill fishing has been fair using jigs and wax worms. Crappie fishing has been fair to good using jigs and minnows. Anglers have been scattered across most of the lake.

Banner Lake (Warren): Trout fishing has been fair to good since the final winter stocking on the March 25.

Three Mile (Union): Channel catfish are being caught in the main lake and west side coves using shad and cut bait. Walleyes can be caught around the dam and crappies are being caught using minnows in the brush piles

Green Valley (Union): Channel catfish are being caught using shad and cut bait. Largemouth bass can be caught using spinner baits.

Summit (Union): Channel catfish fishing is good.

Little River (Decatur): Walleye are being caught while trolling the dam in the evening.

For more information on fishing in southwest Iowa, call the regional office in Lewis at 712-769-2587.

Southeast

Mississippi River Pools 16 to 19: Catfishing is good to excellent on shad guts and crushed minnows in **Pool 16** and crappie fishing is good on minnows in the backwaters. In **Pool 17**, catfish is excellent on shad guts and night crawlers. Crappie fishing is good on minnows in backwaters. Walleye fishing is good below the dam at Muscatine on minnow and jigs. In **Pool 18**, catfish are good on shad guts and night crawlers. Crappie good, but spotty, in the backwaters.

Lake Rathbun (Appanoose): Try fishing the windblown shorelines for channel catfish. Use shad guts or dead minnows as bait. Crappie fishing remains slow. Warmer temperatures will get the fish moving into shallow water areas and coves.

Lake Sugema (Van Buren): Largemouth bass have been hitting small crankbaits and other artificial lures. Bluegills have been biting on small jigs.

Lake Keomah (Mahaska): Channel catfish can be caught using dead minnows. Try using jigs and spinner baits for largemouth bass.

Lake Wapello (Davis): Largemouth bass will start schooling around structure. Try using a jig and pig combo or fishing a spinner bait very slowly.

Lake Macbride (Johnson): A few walleyes are being taken on rocky points and on the dam. White jigs and jig/minnow combos have been popular. Try at or after dusk for best results.

Coralville Reservoir (Johnson): Channel catfish have been biting for some anglers in the shallow, warmer water. Dead shad on the bottom have been producing best.

Wapsipinicon and Cedar rivers: Walleyes are being caught on jig and minnow combinations. Best areas are in the tailwater areas of dams.

Wapsipinicon River: Northern pike have been biting on small spinners.

For more information on fishing in southeast Iowa, call the regional office in Brighton at 319-694-2430.

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